

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 02887 240345Z  
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ISO-00 MCT-01 HA-05 IO-13  
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R 231121Z JUN 78  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 669  
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
AMCONSUL MADRAS  
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 2887

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, PINS, CE

SUBJ: SRI LANKA TERRORISM; HOW SERIOUS?

REF: (A) COLOMBO 2613, (B) COLOMBO 2697, (C) COLOMBO 2467,  
(D) COLOMBO 1480

1. SUMMARY: A RECENT NEWS ARTICLE IN THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS ABOUT THE LIBERATION TIGER MOVEMENT, INSURGENTS OF THE PAST, UNIVERSITY PROTESTORS AND GOVERNMENT REACTION TO THEM, DEPICTS SRI LANKA AS A NATION STRUGGLING TO STEM THE THREATS OF VIOLENT TERRORIST GROUPS. DESCRIBING EVENTS THAT HAVE OCCURRED OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS AS THOUGH THEY WERE CURRENT OCCURRANCES, THE AUTHOR CREATES A DISTORTED IMAGE OF THE ATMOSPHERE PREVAILING IN SRI LANKA TODAY. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE JUNE 10TH ISSUE OF THE LONDON ECONOMIST CARRIES AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "TIGERS AT LARGE." THE ARTICLE CONCERNS THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TAMIL LIBERATION TIGER MOVEMENT (LTM), AND THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA (GSL) EFFORTS TO CONTROL THE LTM AND OTHER POTENTIALLY DISRUPTIVE FORCES. WHILE NOT FACTUALLY INACCURATE, THE ARTICLE IS MISLEADING. THE AUTHOR ATTEMPTS TO PAINT A SCENARIO OF NEARLY FULL SCALE MOBILIZATION BY SRI

LANKA POLICE AND MILITARY FORCES IN AN EFFORT TO SAVE THE COUNTRY FROM THE TIGERS AND FROM EFFORTS BY ROHANA WIJEWEERA, THE RECENTLY RELEASED LEADER OF THE JANATHA VIMUKTHI PERAMUNA (JVP), TO MUSTER OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNING UNITED NATIONAL PARTY. STATING THAT THREATS FROM THESE FACTIONS, COUPLED WITH "UNIVERSITY UNREST" HAVE CAUSED THE GSL TO FORM ANTI-TERRORIST POLICE UNITS PATTERNED AFTER "THOSE IN FRANCE, BRITIAN, AND WEST GERMANY," THE AUTHOR GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT SRI LANKA IS NOW BOUND BY A TIGHT BAND OF SECURITY AND THAT A FEELING OF IMMINENT EXPLOSION PERVADES THE ISLAND.

### 3. ANTI-TERRORIST POLICE UNITS

THE ARTICLE STATES THAT THE GSL IS ESTABLISHING AN ANTI-TERRORIST POLICE UNIT PATTERNED AFTER THE EUROPEAN MODELS MENTIONED ABOVE. SEVERAL SPECAIL UNITS ARE BEING FORMED. WE KNOW THAT PLANS TO FORM A SECURITY UNIT PRIMARILY FOR PROTECTION OF THE NEW PRESIDENT AND VISITNG OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN UNDER WAY SINCE LATE LAST YEAR. NO DOUBT, THE TIGER INCIDENTS HAVE PROMPTED A STEPPING-UP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS AND OTHER SPECIAL POLICE UNITS, BUT IT WOULD BE WRONG TO ATTRIBUTE THEIR EXISTENCE TOTALLY TO THE LIBERATION TIGER MOVEMENT.

### 4. GSL ANTI-TERRORIST ACTIONS

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF INCREASED POLICE VIGILENCE IN THE NORTH AND THE NORTHWEAST OF THE ISLAND (REF B), THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF GOVERNMENT ANTI-TERRORISM ACTIVITY. OFFICIAL  
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ESTIMATES PLACE LTM MEMBERSHIP AT ABOUT 100. AS STATED REF C, MANY LTM MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS ARE THOUGHT TO RESIDE OUTSIDE SRI LANKA. ABOUT 33 ALLEGED MEMBERS OF THE LTM HAVE BEEN ARRESTED SINCE MID-APRIL. ACCORDING TO NEWS REPORTS, ONE THIRD OF THEM HAVE ALREADY BEEN RELEASED AND THE RELEASE OF SEVERAL OTHERS IS EXPECTED SOON. IF WE ARE TO BELIEVE OFFICIAL MEDIA REPORTS, WE CAN ASSUME THAT UP TO FORTY PERCENT OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS REMAINING IN SRI LANKA ARE OR HAVE BEEN IN POLICE CUSTODY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS NO STRONG EVIDENCE THATTHOSE ALREADY ARRESTED AS TIGERS ARE ACTUALLY MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZATION. THE MODEST NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL MOVED TO THE AREA OF THE LTM ACTIVITIES (REF C) AND REPORTS THAT THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF TIGHT POLICE SECURITY EXCEPT IN THE JAFFNA AREA, SUGGESTS THAT THE GSL IS INTENT ON STOPPING THE LIBERATION TIGERS AND REMAINS CONFIDENT THAT IT CAN PREVENT THE SPREAD OF LTM ACTIVITIES.

### 5. WIJEWEERA AND JVP

THE ECONOMIST ARTICLE MAKES REFERENCE TO A RECENT REPORT THAT ROHANA WIJEWEERA HAS BEEN PROMOTING POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT POLICIES. THE ARTICLE IMPLIES THAT WIJEWEERA'S SPEECHES ARE AIMED AT REUNITING THE JVP, WHICH HE LED IN THE

1971 UPRISING, OR ARE INTENDED TO SPUR VIOLENT OPPOSITION TO THE UNP GOVERNMENT WHICH RELEASED HIM FROM PRISON. IT TIRES TO LINK RECENT CRIMINAL ACTIVITY (GANG ROBBERIES) AND PROTEST POSTER HANGING BY SOME OF WIJEWEEERA'S FORMER COLLABORATORS WITH HIS POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. WHILE THE JVP IS ACTIVELY RECRUITING ADHERENTS, THE ECONOMIST ARTICLE MAKES THEM APPEAR TO PRESENT A MORE IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE GOVERNMENT THAN WE BELIEVE TO BE THE CASE.

6. UNIVERSITY ATMOSPHERE

THE AUTHOR OF THE ARTICLE REFERS TO "UNIVERSITY UNREST." AFTER A PERIOD OF SERIOUS CAMPUS DISTURBANCES (REF D) DURING WHICH SEVERAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA CAMPUSES WERE SHUT DOWN, ALL CAMPUSES REOPENED APRIL 24 AND HAVE BEEN WITHOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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SERIOUS PROTEST OR INCIDENTS SINCE.

7. IN SUM, THE ECONOMIST ARTICLE GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT SRI LANKA IS UNDER THE SHADOW OF A TERRORIST/ANTI-TERRORIST CLOUD TO WHICH ALL GOVERNMENT ATTENTION HAS BEEN FOCUSED. THE ARTICLE OVERSTATES THE CASE.  
LEVIN

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NNN

## Message Attributes

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